Decision Memo
Pawnee National Grassland
Weld County

Baker Draw Shooting Area Improvement Project
(Formally Wildhorse Shooting Area)

This memo is to document consideration of NEPA compliance relating to the Baker Draw Shooting Area Improvement Project. I have determined that this project is consistent with the following categories:

DECISION: CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS – 36 CFR § 220.6 (d) and (e).
(a) General. A proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and if:
(2) The proposed action is within a category listed in § 220.6 (d) and (e).

220.6 (d) (5) "Repair and maintenance of recreation sites and facilities."
220.6 (d) (4) "Repair and maintenance of existing roads."

Project Description:

Location
The legal description is Township 8 North, Range 63 W, and Section 5, Weld County, Colorado, in the vicinity of Baker Draw. Please see attached map for project location.

The project area is within Management Areas 6.4 Mid-Composition- High Structure; Native Shortgrass Prairie and 6.6 Mid-Composition- Low Structure; Grassland Resource Production, under the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forest and Pawnee National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) as amended (USDA Forest Service 1997). Recreational activities for both management areas include hunting, wildlife viewing, dispersed recreation, camping, hiking, picnicking, driving for pleasure, and horseback riding.

Baker Draw Shooting Area Improvement Project Details
Currently, 99.8% of the Pawnee National Grassland is open to shooting, meaning that shooting can take place almost anywhere on the Pawnee National Grassland; often in locations that are unsafe due to lack of proper backstops and visibility issues. The Pawnee National Grassland has a very fragmented land pattern. Only 39% of the west

end is National Forest system land. Because of this fragmented land pattern, many different, often conflicting, activities are practiced in the same locations and all activities are within close proximity of our neighbors.

The Pawnee National Grassland proposes to improve a site that is currently being used by recreational shooters by placing eight to ten shooting benches suitable for 100 yard small bore rifle target shooting, an earthen berm for a backstop and side berms. This shooting area would be open to the public seven days a week from dawn until dusk. Improving this shooting area would provide the opportunity for a safe shooting environment that could be easily monitored and maintained. The shooting area would also provide public recreational shooting opportunities for hunter education, youth groups, and marksmanship training for the surrounding communities of Greeley, Fort Collins, Loveland, Cheyenne and Denver.

Scoping:
Initially, District Ranger Lori Bell contacted interested parties in writing and via-email concerning the improvements on two other areas and received approximately 500 responses with only five respondents registering issues and concerns. After being contacted by some of the respondents with concerns, Ranger Bell added two additional areas, and sent out a second scoping letter. One of these areas was in the Coal Allotment and the other was in the Wildhorse Allotment and is now known as the Baker Draw Shooting Area Improvement project and was described in the scoping letter and notices as the "Wildhorse Shooting Area." Both the Coal and Wildhorse Range Allotment areas are informal shooting areas that could benefit from these proposed improvements. However, the Coal area is near a prairie dog town that may be used by mountain plovers. The Baker Draw Shooting Area Improvement project, located in the Wildhorse Allotment, does have some hydrology concerns that will be avoided by site placement, and access to that site would require some road improvements in order to provide year round access. During the second scoping, Ranger Bell received only eleven responses. Most respondents were very supportive; however, five respondents raised the following issues and concerns:

1. Unregulated shooting is creating an unsafe condition. There is a need for improvements to allow safer recreational target shooting since some shooters are not following safe practices.

2. There is a need for protection of resources and infrastructure including:
   - preventing risk of wildfire started by shooting; and
   - irresponsible dumping of shooting targets.

3. Nearby private property owners are concerned about the proximity of recreational shooting to private property, the noise, traffic, and possible ricocheting bullets.

4. Soil and water quality could be affected by erosion and lead contamination.

5. There may be a negative effect to nearby private ranges.

Decision

After review of the interdisciplinary analysis, I have decided to authorize the Baker Draw Shooting Area Improvement Project.

My decision to authorize the Baker Draw Shooting Area Improvement Project complies with Forest Service policy and direction regarding the management of use and occupancy on National Forest System lands. The project is consistent with the management direction of the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forest and Pawnee National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) as amended (USDA Forest Service 1997). I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances exists that warrant further analysis and documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement.

Based on the resource narratives that follow below, the discussion of extraordinary circumstances, and the project record as summarized in this decision, I find that this decision is consistent with agency regulations concerning extraordinary circumstances 36 CFR part 220.6 (2). A proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA) only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action. Resource conditions to consider include:

a. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.

The potential effects of the Proposed Action have been determined to be 'No Impact' or 'No Effect'. This degree of effect does not warrant the preparation of an EA or an EIS. However, the Pawnee National Grassland is home to the Mountain Plover. To reduce disturbance effects to the mountain plover and avoid destroying nests, construct the shooting range outside of the mountain plover nesting season of April 10- to July 10th. If this timeframe cannot be met, adhere to the Final Environmental Impact Statement Mountain Plover Management Strategy, which states that plover surveys may be used to clear small areas for recreation use. In this case, coordinate with the wildlife biologist for a nest site survey within one week of the implementation start date. If a nest is found, timing restrictions for implementation may be implemented.

b. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

The project will not occupy or modify any floodplains or wetlands. The project area is not within a municipal watershed.

c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.

This project is not within designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.

d. Inventoried Roadless Areas.

No part of the project is within Inventoried Roadless Areas.

e. Research Natural Areas.

There are no Research Natural Areas in the project under consideration.

f. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.

My decision to authorize the Baker Draw Shooting Area Improvement Project will not adversely affect cultural resources. Known sites in the project area will be avoided, and monitoring will occur, if necessary, during project implementation. Mitigation measures will be implemented as necessary to prevent adverse effects to any new sites discovered.

g. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

My decision to authorize the Baker Draw Shooting Area Improvement Project will not adversely affect archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas because no sites have been located in the project area and monitoring will occur during project implementation.

Resource Protection Measures

The project site does not include wetlands (or playas) with regard to fill or adding soils to create the berm/backdrop. The USFS will:

- Control and contain lead bullets and bullet fragments using earthen berms and backstops. USFS will construct berms to resist being eroded during heavy rain/wind events.

- Monitoring and/or adjusting soil pH (i.e. adding lime or phosphate) to immobilize lead, and controlling runoff. The USFS will consider build-up and removal of lead from soils (from bullets) by avoidance of wetlands and through clean up operations. The USFS will define and follow a regular/consistent reclamation plan.

- Remove the lead from the range and recycle, through hand raking, sifting, or screening.

To minimize the introduction of noxious weeds in the project area, mitigations will include:

- The district weed crew will monitor the site for invasive species and treat as needed via spraying or pulling invasive plants.

A cultural resource monitor may be required if blading is needed to install gravel for the parking area.

To control litter, and prevent damage to resources, infrastructure and protect neighbors, recreationalists, and wildlife:

- Post regulations and protocols at the site for safer shooting practices.
- Direct shooting to an earthen backstop away from private property and roads.
- Consult with the National Rifle Association on the berm location and other design issues.
- Build a fence to keep cattle out of the site.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (1969), the National Forest Management Act (1976), and all other applicable laws and regulations.

This action is consistent with the management direction, including standards and guidelines, as outlined in the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forest and Pawnee National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) as amended (USDA Forest Service 1997). This action will comply with requirements of the Clean Water Act.

No concerns of disproportionate health or environmental effects surfaced. Therefore, I find my decision will not disproportionately create high and adverse health or environmental effects to low income or minority populations. There are no anticipated impacts on consumers, minority groups, American Indians, women, or civil rights. There are no anticipated impacts to Treaty and trust responsibilities regarding traditional cultural properties, religious use areas, and archaeological management issues.

There are no known direct, indirect, cumulative, or unavoidable adverse effects on the environment. This action will not pose a threat to public health or safety. Implementation of this project meets the resource protection requirements of 36 CFR 219.17. There is not a threat to public health and safety beyond that already present. In fact, it should reduce some of the current impacts (safety, litter etc) by concentrating some of those impacts into one area where it is more easily monitored and managed.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Project

Based on the environmental analysis and past experience, the effects of implementing this action will be of limited context and intensity and will result in little or no effects to either the physical or biological components of the environment. No extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause this action to have significant effects; therefore, this action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS) per 36 CFR 220.6 (d) (5).

Administrative Review (Appeals) and Implementation
This decision is not subject to the procedures of 36 CFR Part 215 for Notice, Comment, and Appeal. This decision may be implemented immediately.

Contact
For further information about this project, contact Lori Bell, Pawnee District Ranger at (970) 346-5003.

Lori A. Bell 6-23-2011

Lori A. Bell

District Ranger
RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL

Enclosure